



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Breaking Open the Word
Mary Birmingham

28th Sunday of Ordinary Time | Year B



Jesus and the Rich Young Man;
Chinese depiction of Jesus and the rich man (Mark 10) - 1879, Beijing, China



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy. (Found in your parish Sacramentary.)

Option 2: Use the prayer provided below.

*THE PRAYER,
O LORD MY GOD
(By Saint Anselm.)*

O Lord my God.
Teach my heart this day
where and how to find you.

You have made me and re-made me,
and you have bestowed on me
all the good things I possess,
and still I do not know you.
I have not yet done
that for which I was made.

Teach me to seek you,
for I cannot seek you
unless you teach me,
or find you
unless you show yourself to me.

Let me seek you in my desire;
let me desire you in my seeking.
Let me find you by loving you;
let me love you when I find you.

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
Version 2.0

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Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today's liturgy continues the slow movement toward the fulfillment of Jesus' ministry that we will proclaim and manifest in the weeks ahead as the liturgical year winds down.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?

First Reading: Wisdom 7: 7-11

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ **This reading from the Book of Wisdom extols the benefits of wisdom beyond all human possession.**
- ▶ The author of this text was writing in the midst of a Greek-speaking, Hellenistic culture that was influenced by Jewish thought.
- ▶ Solomon is the great Old Testament icon of wisdom.
- ▶ He prayed for it and God granted his prayer.
- ▶ Solomon understood wisdom to be the greatest treasure he could possess—greater than wealth, health, riches or any human attraction.
- ▶ Wisdom is an eternal gift.
- ▶ Wisdom is the only gift that matters. It is only through human wisdom that human beings are capable of maintaining an upright course in the world.
- ▶ People are to seek it beyond all other gifts—seek it, desire it and pray for it above all else.
- ▶ Wisdom should be the primary focus of human life.
- ▶ God embodies wisdom and gifts us with the wisdom he embodies.
- ▶ God gifts his prophets with it and thus passes it on to us.
- ▶ The Messianic reign was expected to be imbued with it.
- ▶ A common thread throughout the Hebrew scriptures is the comparison between riches and wisdom. It is thus an obvious choice to accompany today's Gospel.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News for us today in this reading?
- ▶ What is your understanding of wisdom?
- ▶ Where does wisdom exist in your own life?
- ▶ Where is wisdom needed at this point in your life?
- ▶ How do you feel about the assertion that it is a greater gift than all others—riches, health and all human attraction?
- ▶ Who are the wisdom figures in your own life?
- ▶ Has there ever been a time in your life in which you chose wisdom over the status quo or wealth or riches?

Second Reading: Hebrews 4: 12-13

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ **The author of Hebrews is a hymn in praise of God's holy word and its power in our lives.**
- ▶ Today's author of Hebrews extols the gift of God's word.
- ▶ Hebrew Scriptures understood God's word to be revealed in action—in other words—one need only look to salvation history; salvation history itself is the embodiment and revelation of God's word.
- ▶ God's will is revealed through God's word.
- ▶ The author hearkens to the prophet Jeremiah who promises that God will enter into a new covenant hallmarked by a deep, inner understanding of the mind and heart of God.
- ▶ Jesus was the very reality of that promise.
- ▶ He lived in and through the mind and heart of his Father.
- ▶ He epitomized the divine intimate communion to which we are all called.
- ▶ The intimate communion Jesus shared with his Father found concrete expression in the life of faithfulness to which he invites each and every one of us.
- ▶ Jesus' faithfulness was a faithfulness that led to the free offering of his life for the sake of sinners.
- ▶ The word strengthens us and guides us in the way of faithfulness.
- ▶ Believers not only experience God's will through God's word, they also find the deepest level of human comfort.
- ▶ The word reaches into the depths of our soul and convicts us, challenges us, and

comforts us.

- ▶ The word discerns what is upright and leads us in that upright path.
- ▶ The word judges the human heart.
- ▶ The origin of the word *judge* is *crisis*—to judge is to create a crisis that leads to decision.
- ▶ God's word reveals our denial, our sin and our self-deceptions; it invites complete and total conversion of heart--total transformation.
- ▶ Jesus was intimate with God's word—his spoken word, his written word and the word written on his heart. He shows us how to navigate its power and inherent wisdom in our lives.
- ▶ As the prophet of Isaiah reminded us, God's word accomplishes what it promises; it will not be silenced—IT WILL GO FORTH!
- ▶ God only had to speak his WORD and the world came into being. The word is powerful and it is generative.
- ▶ God's word continues throughout eternity.
- ▶ It is fully revealed in both Testaments.
- ▶ The New Testament is the revelation of the Gospel of Christ—the Good News of Jesus' salvation.
- ▶ The people to whom the author was speaking were dangerously close to losing their way. He cautions them to return to God's word and to make it a priority in their lives. Their faith was waning; the letter was intended to invite them to return to their faith-filled roots.
- ▶ Failure to grow in faith is as subject to judgment as is rejection of that same faith.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ In what way is God's word operative in your life?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about God's word?
- ▶ Why is God's word so necessary for our growth in faith?
- ▶ What do you need to do to cooperate with God's grace and thus not lose your way?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about God's relationship with the human family?

Gospel: Mark 10: 17-30

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

For those catechists who prefer an abbreviated interpretation of the Gospel refer to the bulleted points that follow and then choose questions for your reflection found at the end of the entire exegesis. (Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.)

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

Abbreviated treatment of the Gospel:

- ▶ As Jesus continues his journey to Jerusalem Mark raises the stakes, supplies mounting tension, and foreshadows Jesus' imminent encounter with his enemies.
- ▶ The other Gospel narratives reveal a bit more about Jesus' encounter with the man in this text.
- ▶ We discover that he was a young man and also that he was a ruler. Thus, the man is often referred to as the Rich Young Ruler.
- ▶ Jesus' response to the man is not the response for which he was looking.
- ▶ Jesus tells him (and us) something very difficult to hear—it is more difficult for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for wealthy people to enter God's reign.
- ▶ The saying was as troublesome and controversial then as it is now.
- ▶ The response of the disciples is indicative of the culture in which they lived.
- ▶ Economic philosophies of modern societies possess a hidden yet core belief that in order to get rich someone has to be stepped on. Very often a subliminal attitude exists that says great wealth is a sign of injustice for the reason just stated.
- ▶ Not so in first century Palestine. The disciples were incredulous. If a rich person could not be saved, then who could be? In that culture wealth was not a sign of evil but a sign of God's pleasure. The wealthy were considered blessed by God.
- ▶ The belief that God would reward a well-lived, righteous life with great prosperity was the prevalent theology of the day.
- ▶ We see this belief as a primary thread running through the repartee that Job has with his friends and with God in the Book of Job.
- ▶ Poverty was a sign of God's displeasure.
- ▶ Jesus breaks with this traditional belief, however.
- ▶ Neither does Jesus subscribe to the notion that great wealth in and of itself constitutes exploitation of others nor that it is a sign of God's blessing and virtuosity.
- ▶ Jesus responds to the man by asking him if he has sinned against any of the commandments regarding the use of his wealth.
- ▶ The man insists that he has indeed been righteous in such matters.
- ▶ Jesus accepts the man and takes him at his word. He does not question the

truthfulness of his assertion, thus substantiating the possibility that wealth can be acquired without exploiting others in the process. The rich can indeed gain their wealth through diligence, discipline, delayed gratification and patience.

- ▶ He does not tell the man that wealth is wrong, evil or unjust.
- ▶ He does, however, tell him that great wealth does make it difficult to enter God's kingdom.
- ▶ Many hypotheses have been given over the centuries to interpret his meaning.
- ▶ One popular interpretation is that the gates of Jerusalem were so narrow that a camel carrying a large load had a difficult time entering without unburdening the load from the camel's back. Once unloaded, with great effort, pushing and prodding the camel could make it through—difficult to be sure, but not impossible.
- ▶ Another interpretation was that there was a word that sounded like the Aramaic word for camel and that is the word Jesus used and that he was therefore simply misheard. The word in question was twine. In other words, Jesus could have been saying that it was very difficult to get twine through the eye of a needle but if a person pressed it to his or her moistened lips, it could be done.
- ▶ As we humans are wont to do, such explanations simply water down Jesus' intent.
- ▶ Every culture uses such metaphors and catch phrases to drive home a point—such as “a snowball's chance”. Just as it is impossible for a snowball to survive in an oven so is it impossible for the rich to enter the reign of God.
- ▶ That **is** what Jesus is saying; yet there is a nuance. It is not a sin to be rich nor are rich people evil for being rich (no more than poor people are always virtuous). He did not paint all rich people with that brush.
- ▶ Jesus was not simply giving a teaching on generosity either.
- ▶ Jesus was indicting all of us. There is something wrong with all of us—we are all sinners—rich and poor alike.
- ▶ Money, however, has the insidious power to blind us to the sin in our lives.
- ▶ It deceives us and robs us of the necessary discernment to discover what is really going on in our soul—our spiritual state.
- ▶ Every human being needs God's wisdom—his gracious, unmerited, freely given wisdom and grace to see ourselves as he sees us—warts and all.
- ▶ It is impossible *for any of us* to enter the kingdom without God.
- ▶ In place of money we can put any of the distractions that keep us from intimate communion with God that leads to love of God and love of others.

This brings the abbreviated interpretation to a close. Refer to the questions at the end of the entire exegesis and choose the appropriate questions for your reflection.

Further elaboration of the Gospel:

The following exegesis is provided for your further and continued reflection.

- ▶ In addition to the above material there are several other interesting elements in this Gospel for our reflection.
- ▶ The young man approached Jesus. He obviously did not have everything that satisfied him in spite of his great wealth and power.

- ▶ Something was missing. He knew it and thus approached Jesus.
- ▶ A good Jewish man would have already known the answer to his question. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” It was a common theological affirmation taught by rabbis and the Scriptures. The answer was: obey God’s commandments and avoid sin.
- ▶ The man already knew the answer. Why did he ask Jesus?
- ▶ Jesus lets us see into the man’s heart. He tells the man that there is indeed something lacking in him.
- ▶ The man tells Jesus that he is successful religiously, spiritually, economically, socially and morally. He wants to know if he was missing something. He senses something missing in himself.
- ▶ Jesus affirms his intuition.
- ▶ The very fact that he counted on his own actions and righteous deeds is an indication that something was indeed missing. He doubted himself; he was insecure; he was empty. How could he really know if he was good enough?
- ▶ Jesus tells him what was missing and the man became nonplussed in the telling.
- ▶ Jesus sets the stage for his answer to him by asking the man why he called him (Jesus) good. The man did not personally know Jesus; he had no way of knowing for sure if Jesus was good or not.
- ▶ Jesus told the man that God is the only true *Good*.
- ▶ There was something askew with the man’s understand of what is good.
- ▶ Jesus then redefined the man’s understanding and told him to sell everything he has and give it to the poor; then he exhorted the man to follow him.
- ▶ Jesus was telling him that if he was serious about discerning what it would take to gain eternal life, then of course he should continue to live the righteous life he was living—that was a given—but if he was serious about becoming more intimate with God then Jesus was inviting him to go deeper—to repent of the way in which he was using the successes he had achieved and the riches he had amassed.
- ▶ Such amassed successes and wealth have the insidious power to feed our ego and propel us into a bargaining relationship with God. We tell God that we deserve that God answer our prayers because of our own achievements and efforts.
- ▶ The man put his faith in himself—his work, his wealth, his beauty—all the things that go with great wealth—rather than the living God.
- ▶ Jesus invited him to imagine life without all those riches—without prestige—without the world looking upon him as better than others. Jesus was inviting him to imagine a life in the loving embrace of God without all the trappings of this world.
- ▶ The man could not hear what Jesus had to say. The word *sad* is better translated *grieved*.
- ▶ Another time that word was used was when Jesus sweated blood in the Garden of Gethsemane before his arrest and before he was to enter into the complete and utter deprivation of his human life—all comforts, all attachments, all wealth, all life—life as he knew it.
- ▶ Jesus was about to lose the comfort of his Father’s presence. He would be alone with no human consolation to uphold him. He would be losing his very self.

- ▶ The man was *grieved* because his money had become for him what the consolation and intimacy Jesus enjoyed with his Father was for him.
- ▶ Intimacy with his Father was the center of Jesus' identity. Yet he marched to his death seemingly alone and abandoned. If he was to truly experience the human condition he had to experience what humans experience at the point of death. No matter how many loved ones grieve at our side—crossing over that threshold of death is a walk that every person must take alone. Jesus had to experience human death for his humanity to have been believed and to have made a difference. He had to experience the loss of total abandonment—the loss of his very self.
- ▶ Loss of money was for the young man loss of *his* very self.
- ▶ We can look to God as our boss, our example, our mentor and our guide, but if we want him to be our Savior, then we have to rid ourselves of anything that was taking his place.
- ▶ We all have things in our lives that take the place of our need for a Savior. Jesus asks us the same question: “What are those things?”
- ▶ It is very easy to bet on our salvation based on our personal merit. It is the ultimate human temptation and we all fall prey to it.
- ▶ Our personal merit and worthiness however are the very things that keep us from understanding the cross of Christ.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to ONE or MORE appropriate questions (as time allows) in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface their insights in the wider group. Catechist responds by sharing his or her own experience. See appendix for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What is the Good News in the Gospel?
- ▶ What is the lesson in this Gospel?
- ▶ What are the primary themes in this Gospel?
- ▶ What things in your life take the place of your need for a Savior?
- ▶ What things in your life would be very difficult for you to let go of?
- ▶ What is the wisdom inherent in Jesus' encounter with the young man?
- ▶ In what way, if any, do you relate to the man's response to Jesus?
- ▶ In what way, if any, do you see yourself as worthy of salvation? Where does unworthiness exist in your life?
- ▶ If you were to point to all the good things you have done, what would those be? What would Jesus' message to you be about those good things?
- ▶ In what way is this message a message about the Cross of Jesus?

Catechist invites participants to reflect on the following question in the group or in their journal.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

Concluding Prayer

*THE PRAYER,
O LORD MY GOD
(By Saint Anselm.)*

*O Lord my God.
Teach my heart this day
where and how to find you.*

*You have made me and re-made me,
and you have bestowed on me
all the good things I possess,
and still I do not know you.
I have not yet done
that for which I was made.*

*Teach me to seek you,
for I cannot seek you
unless you teach me,
or find you
unless you show yourself to me.*

*Let me seek you in my desire;
let me desire you in my seeking.
Let me find you by loving you;
let me love you when I find you.*

OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

- What things in your life take the place of your need for a Savior?

It is very easy to do the Lord's work and very subliminally believe in one's own sense of entitlement. Jesus reminds us today that salvation is not something to which we are entitled. It is pure gift. We cannot earn it on our own; we can only achieve it with the help of God. It is impossible to achieve on our own.

I often find myself arguing with God over what I perceive to be unanswered prayers. What has become Savior in my life is my dream and obsessive desire for peace, serenity and an illness-free existence for my loved ones.

I incessantly work to create that environment in my home but it always falls short as we continue to deal with the ravages of illness that robs us of peace. Thus I create peace-filled spaces, I pray and tell God what he needs to do to insure my peace and just when I think I have relinquished control of my life to him, I find myself telling God how I want to be saved.

Jesus' encounter with the young man today reminds me that when I tell God that everything I am and I have belongs to him I must really mean it and let my actions prove it.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Twenty Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wisdom 7: 7-11 | Hebrews 4: 12-13 | Mark 10: 17-30

Catholic Social Teaching
Kingdom of God
Salvation/Soteriology
Morality
Moral Decision Making
Mary Model for the Church

Eschatology, Heaven, Hell and
Purgatory.
Creed
Scripture and Revelation I or II
Liturgical Year
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

While today's Gospel continues Jesus' catechism about who is first and last in the kingdom with the stories of the rich man, and his exhortation about giving up riches. His is a continued commentary on the role of servanthood in the reign of God. Such stories beg us to ask who is welcome and who is not welcome in our assemblies—who is first and who is last. Is our Church ordered in such a way that we truly believe that the first and the last stand equally at the Lord's banquet table? We sometimes pay lip service to that truth, but our actions reveal a different truth. We cannot self-righteously lay blame at the feet of our hierarchical structure, either. It is a very human tendency to regard later converts to anything as immature, uninformed and less enlightened. Starting at the presumed top, there is no doubt a temptation for cardinals to regard new bishops as lower on the food chain, thus less important. Bishops could be tempted to regard the ministry of clergy as insignificant in comparison to the important work of bishops. Clergy might view the laity as Johnny-come-lately's with an ax to grind and their place to find. Laity in upper level church could be enticed to regard those in parish work as inferior and their work trivial. Those in parish work might be seduced into judging their parishioners as ignorant and uninformed. Active parishioners might be tantalized to dismiss inactive parishioners as inconsequential. Groups within the parish might be charmed into thinking that new groups are a threat to their established stature and tenure. Church-goers might be beguiled into thinking that somehow God loves them more and knows them best. "Like a merry-go-round on a frenzied, unstoppable track, the very human temptation to think we know how God will act, how God should respond and who God should choose, persist ad nauseam on the human continuum."

(Mary Birmingham, Word and Worship Workbook, Year A, 515, 516). Catholic social teaching reminds us that we all stand equal before God—that we all possess the same human dignity. Those who think they should be first will come in last and the lowly will be exalted. It is thus opportune to focus our attention on CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING.

KINGDOM OF GOD

Today's Gospel highlights Jesus' continued proclamation of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not what you expect it to be. Those who smugly think they are in will be out and those who think they are out will be in. The Gospel requires more than words; it requires faithful action. Those who live righteous lives can expect to be true citizens in the kingdom of God. It is thus appropriate that today we focus our attention on the KINGDOM OF GOD.

SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY

Today's Gospel highlights Jesus' continued proclamation of the kingdom of God. He reminds the people that riches must not distract them from their responsibility to establish the reign of God. He said that the rich would have a difficult time entering the kingdom. Those who smugly think they are in will be out and those who think they are out will be in. Those who are distracted by wealth must rely on the mercy of God to save. Salvation is a free gift. The Gospel requires more than words; it requires faithful action. Those who live righteous lives can expect to be true citizens in the kingdom of God. It is thus appropriate that today we focus our attention on the SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY.

MORALITY

Jesus presents his catechism on what it means to live in the reign of God. It presupposes living a righteous life flowing from one's love of God. Jesus calls believers to live the moral life. What constitutes a moral life? Today we will focus our attention on what the Church teaches about MORALITY.

MORAL DECISION MAKING

Jesus presents his catechism on what it means to live in the reign of God. It presupposes living a righteous life flowing from one's love of God. Jesus calls believers to live the moral life. What constitutes a moral life? How do we make moral decisions? What constitutes a moral decision? Today we will focus our attention on what the Church teaches about MORAL DECISION MAKING.

MARY MODEL FOR THE CHURCH

October is the month we remember and honor the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and model disciple. It is thus appropriate we focus our attention this month and in today's session on MARY, MODEL DISCIPLE.

ESCHATOLOGY: END TIMES, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

In today's Gospel the man asks what is needed to obtain eternal life. Jesus proclaims his eschatological promise of everlasting life in this section on the reign of God. He is on the road to Jerusalem and knows what awaits him—the culmination of his ministry. Mark highlights one of Jesus' favorite themes. The reign of God is not what you expect it to be. Those who smugly think they are in will be out and those who think they are out will be in. The Gospel requires more than words; it requires faithful action. Those who live righteous lives can expect to be true citizens in the kingdom of God—here and now and in the hereafter. It is thus appropriate that today we focus our attention on **ESCHATOLOGY: END TIMES, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.**

CREED

Jesus has spent these weeks proclaiming the kingdom and calling people to faith in him and the salvation that was being freely offered in and through him. He invites faith in him and his work. What exactly do we believe? God chose Israel. God entered into a covenant relationship with Israel. God created Israel into a people. God led the people from slavery to freedom. God provided for them in the Promised Land. Then the people sinned. God sent his messengers the prophets (servants in the parable) to invite the people to repent and prepare them for the new banquet his Son (Jesus) would prepare. The people rejected the Son. God then sent new messengers—the apostles to repeat the invitation. The Son was rejected and God sent more servants (apostles) to repeat the invitation. Again the people rejected their invitation. The first guests (Israel) refused the invitation to the banquet (kingdom). The apostles were instructed to go out and invite the good and bad because both exist in the kingdom—saint and sinner—Gentile and Jew. The Gentiles accept the offer and the Church was born. All Christians are called to profess faith in the living Christ. It is thus a good springboard for focusing our attention on the Christian CREED.

SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION I or II

Jesus is the revelation of God. Jesus teaches us the mind and heart of God and his plan for establishing his kingdom on earth as we await the kingdom yet to come. As Jesus proclaims the kingdom he reveals God to the world. Jesus reveals the King (God) to us. He reveals God to all believers. That revelation continues in God's revealed, holy word. It is fitting that we focus our attention today on **SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION I or II.**

LITURGICAL YEAR

Any Sunday of the year is an appropriate time to reflect on the cycle of the Church year. Every Sunday is a most appropriate time to address what we celebrate in the unfolding liturgical cycle. The entire mystery of Christ from his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension to the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit is manifested in one complete liturgical year. It is thus most appropriate that we address what the Church teaches about the **LITURGICAL YEAR.**

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. This week we continue the series on the Mass. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.

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